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SUBJECT: PROTESTS CANCEL REPEAT ELECTIONS IN BUTENI

REF: Chisinau 1455

Sensitive But Unclassified. Please Protect Accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: After three failed attempts to elect a mayor in the village of Buteni, a fourth round was scheduled for December 16. Though the very popular former mayor had won in the first and second rounds, ruling-party machinations prevented him both from taking office and from running again. Hundreds of activists blocked the polling station to prevent the repeat election from taking place. The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) eventually cancelled the December 16 election. This incident demonstrated the extent to which the Communist Party was willing to use strong-arm tactics to prevent an anti-communist from winning. End Summary.

Tensions Build Before Election Day

¶2. (SBU) Two days before the election scheduled for December 16, dozens of police officers came to the school building that would serve as a voting station, claiming that they had come to perform regular pre-election security checks. The police threatened to fine or arrest people who blocked the voting station, and even forced people to sign documents acknowledging the consequences of such an action. Pre-electoral tension built further on December 15, as busloads of police, numbering in the hundreds, arrived in Buteni from Chisinau.

¶3. (SBU) As reported reftel, Embassy had been warned in advance that the scheduled election might turn violent. The very popular ex-mayor, Anatolie Postalechi, won both the first round and the repeat round, but could not register as a candidate after the losing Communist Party candidate accused him of corruption for using an office cell phone and an official car during the campaign. An Embassy official traveled to Buteni to observe the election-day proceedings.

No Police Force Used, but One Fight Broke Out

¶4. (SBU) In the early hours of the morning on election day, December 16, people from the village started to gather peacefully. By 6:30 AM, there were more than 500 people in front of the school protesting against the holding of repeat elections without the former mayor as a candidate and demanding new elections. These protesters did not allow the local election committee to enter the school to start the elections. However, the local election committee did not authorize the police to open the polling station by force. (Note: The local election committee includes six non-communists and five communists. End Note)

¶5. (SBU) The only violence that occurred was when a communist local councilor Petru Stafi punched one of the protesters, who responded by fighting back. Liberal Democratic Party Leader, Vladimir Filat,

stepped in to try to stop the fighting, but instead was kicked and pounded. There were no serious injuries from the scuffling.

¶6. (SBU) After a stand-off that lasted several hours, the local election committee formally declared that it was impossible to hold the election and then all eleven members of the committee officially resigned. By noon the protesters left. The Chisinau CEC later ruled in favor of holding new elections in Buteni.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) The electoral events in Buteni demonstrate the extreme lengths to which the losing Communist Party will go to deny a victory to its competition. Though Postalechi clearly won in both the June 3 initial election and the July 1 repeat election, the Court of Appeals excluded him from the voting list based on trumped up corruption charges. Only determined action on the part of hundreds of voters prevented the railroading of the Communist candidate into power.

KIRBY